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Organized!

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NANCY VAN PELT,
C.F.L.E., C.F.C.S.



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This book was
Edited by Jeannette R. Johnson
Copyedited by Jocelyn Fay and James Cavig
Designed by Patricia S. Wegh
Cover photo by Joel D. Springer
Illustrations by Mary Bausman
Typeset: 11.5/13.5 Times

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

02 01 00 99 5 4 3 2

R&H Cataloging Service
Van Pelt, Nancy Lue

Get organized! Seven secrets
to sanity for stressed women.

1. Home economics. 2. Time management.
I. Title.

640

ISBN 0-8280-1327-6

DEDICATION

This book is lovingly dedicated to my daughter,
 Carlene Rose Will,
 who contributed to it,
 who has read the manuscript,
 who cares for my grandchildren,
 who is surviving and coping,
 who is enriching my life as well as the lives of others,
 who has experimented with many (if not all) the ideas expressed
 and has proved they work—
 the type of daughter every mother should have;

 and
 To all the women
 who have attended my seminars
 and shared their ideas for sanity with me;

 and
 To all future keepers of the home,
 for whom I hope this book will make it easier.

WARNING!

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6

I

f the clutter in your house is picked up, your bed is made and adorned with 17 perfectly placed Victorian lace pillows, the shower stall sparkles, the miniblinds could pass a white-glove test, the cobwebs are dusted from your front door, and your windows are washed;

if . . . your menus are planned for the next week, and your pantry is well stocked, your closets and shelves orderly, the grocery shopping completed, you can find the name of the orthopedist you used four years ago, your medicine chest is prepared for every emergency and contains no outdated medications, your bureau drawers are freshly lined with scented paper;

if . . . the children's rooms have been redesigned to suit their ages and needs, their toys are neatly categorized and put away systematically, you are never stressed out or irritable, you have energy to spare after accomplishing all the tasks of your day, you are enjoying life, having fun, and are totally organized and fulfilled in every area;

THEN TOSS THIS BOOK!

BUT IF . . . you have trouble getting through the day, you have no master plan for getting daily tasks done, you rarely get the house in working order, you have to plan a month in advance before you can have guests over, your child's room needs a bulldozer before you can enter, the bathroom shelves haven't been straightened since you moved in, your makeup drawer is buried in powder and goo;

if . . . you are behind in everything, and feel totally helpless and

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stressed to the max, you never have time to do anything you want to do, you feel guilty about all the take-out meals your family is consuming, your pantry contains nothing but junk food, and you're too tired to grocery-shop or to cook, you have "to do" lists posted everywhere but you can never get anything done, you are two years behind in reading *Ladies' Home Journal*;

if . . . you haven't washed windows since your college-age child was a toddler, those lumps in the living room that you've been cleaning around all these years turn out to be your husband and kids, and life isn't funny anymore . . .

HANG ON! THIS BOOK IS THE ANSWER TO YOUR DILEMMA!

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hen reading this book, you may get all kinds of crazy notions about me. You may think I am a Perfectly Organized Person (POP) and either hate me or compare yourself unfavorably to me. The POP exists only in an imaginary world. So please don't get the impression that I am perfect in marriage, parenting, hospitality, organization, or any other topic I have written about.

Not long ago a woman said to me, "Nancy, you're not anything like your books." For one thing, I purposely try to keep a low profile in my own circles; but this woman had made assumptions. She may have assumed that Harry and I have the perfect marriage and never argue. She may have assumed that my shopping is always done, menus are planned, and dinner is on the table at 5:30. She may have assumed that I am never rushed or behind, that my house is always a perfect 10, and that I never get tired or frustrated.

The truth is, like many of you, I too must cope with the demands of two hectic occupations and still find time for my husband, family, and me. Maybe this woman would be disappointed (or pleased) to know my house does not always score a 10.

I am no more a superwoman than are any of you. But I can tell you that I have a tremendous capacity for getting things done—only because my home and life are organized. When we look at someone else's successes, we tend to assume it was either luck or just came easy for them. We do not see what has been given up to reach those accomplishments.

No one person has all the answers to specific needs, because homes, families, climates, and people are all so different. But by making use of

the organizational process I describe in this book, you *will* find answers. I hope you'll continue your search for answers as you refine and define what works for you in your family.

Many women have literally changed their lives by putting into practice the Seven Secrets to Sanity outlined in the pages that follow. Even though the demands of your professional life and the priorities in your home and your personal life are constantly changing, keep focused on the concepts I share in this book, and *your* life will be changed too!

Although I can't be with you in person, I will be there in spirit, cheering you on. I wish you the very best!

THE 7 SECRETS

to Sanity for Stressed Women

SECRET TO SANITY 1:

A WORKABLE DAILY PLAN FOR GETTING CHORES DONE

SECRET TO SANITY 2:

THE FIVE-MINUTE MIRACLE FOR PUTTING YOUR HOME IN ORDER

SECRET TO SANITY 3:

A FAIL-SAFE WAY TO TRACK APPOINTMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

SECRET TO SANITY 4:

MENU PLANNING MADE EASY

SECRET TO SANITY 5:

HOW TO SORT THROUGH CLUTTER

SECRET TO SANITY 6:

HOW TO CLEAN LIKE A PRO

SECRET TO SANITY 7:

TIME-OUT FOR SIMPLE PLEASURES



*A*woman who lays her daily plans before the Master Planner usually has her priorities straight.



1

ENTER SUPERWOMAN!



ou've seen her picture in the magazines. Designer suit. Hair and nails salon perfect. Makeup flawless. Never overweight or flat-chested. Confident smile. Briefcase in one hand and a child in the other, she heads out the door at 7:30 a.m. This superwoman of perfect proportions functions efficiently at the office all day. She is greeted at night by an adoring husband and content, well-adjusted children (who are never sick), who welcome her back to a clean, well-ordered home. Within minutes dinner is on the table. And she's still smiling.

Right. A more realistic picture was shared in a letter to Ann Landers by a woman who calls herself "Tired in Texas." She puts in 40 hours a week at her place of employment and just as many at home. Her supervisory job is extremely stressful, and the demands on her ability during the day are awesome. Everyone wants something out of her. When she arrives at home after a grueling day at the office, she still has to prepare dinner, clean the house, wash clothes, pick up the kids from their daily activities, help them with homework, see that they are bathed, and get them to bed. By that time she is dead tired. Each day gets busier than the day before. She describes herself as "totally shot" and feeling as though she's sinking into quicksand. Her body shrieks *Rest!* but her mind tells her she must get ready for the next day.

"And the real problem is that there isn't enough time to do it all," she concludes.

She paints a pretty accurate picture of all women who work outside the home. Most women work out of necessity. Some work so their family can enjoy a bigger home, nicer furniture, a better car, and more amenities. But the resulting crunch on a woman's time is killing her, physically and emotionally.

Full-time Homemakers

It's not just the working woman who's tired. The full-time homemaker also works hard every day. Not only is she expected to prepare three yummy meals a day, but she must keep up with housework, make phone calls, pay household bills, handle family correspondence, and tackle the mountain of other jobs that bombard her.

If she's a mommy, she must be alert every moment so the child doesn't harm himself or herself or the home furnishings. Once the kids are school-age, she dons her chauffeur's hat. While one child stays for after-school band practice, another has piano lessons, and a third a dental appointment. The master planner of all activities, Mom monitors, schedules, and shuttles everyone to appointments, birthday parties, and family outings.

The larger the family living under one roof, the larger the obligation on Mom's shoulders to keep the house presentable, everyone clean and fed, and activities supervised and flowing smoothly. Stay-at-home moms are also expected to do a lion's share of the volunteer jobs at church and school, as well as become involved in community activities.

Since full-time moms have all day to accomplish this (unlike employed moms), it's assumed their homes, children, and schedules are organized, under control, and in order every hour of the day. In actuality, the full-time mom finishes her exhausting day in much the same manner as does her employed counterpart—just as worn out, and receiving much less credit for her efforts.

The Need? Time!

What women want most is enough time to handle all the required tasks without rushing and feeling exhausted. The need for help in man-

aging their time comes as no surprise to women. When Mom goes off to work, Dad's daily schedule does not change much—her schedule is the one that must be adjusted to accommodate employment, home management, children, errands, and outside activities. Women ask how to combine marriage and a career. Men don't even question it; they assume Mom will handle her job *and* her many home assignments.

Women of all ages enter and leave the job market. They change careers, run their own businesses, have children, marry or remarry, and start, complete, or add to their education. The result is fatigue and a severe time crunch, especially for those who attempt to combine a career with maintaining a marriage and raising responsible children.

Homemaking Styles

Some women cope better with the pressure than others. Why? A *Self* magazine report on American women describes several types of women who share the same priorities in regard to how they want to divide their time for work, home, and personal activities. According to the report, how a woman manages her time is determined by personal values—no one system would be right for every woman. In the study, the women were divided into three categories: the traditional homemaker, the transitional woman, and the achieving woman, labels to help us understand their distinct attitudes.

The Traditional Homemaker. The traditional homemaker plans her life around marriage and children. She has always wanted to be a wife and mother. Caring for her home and family takes priority. A traditional homemaker views work outside the home as a job, not a career. She believes a woman can't be her best when attempting to combine motherhood and homemaking with a career. Her sense of accomplishment comes from raising a family and caring for her home. Traditional values lead her to believe the husband's job is more important than the wife's.

The research concluded that the traditional homemaker is happiest with a 20-50-30 division of her time—20 percent on professional endeavors, 50 percent on home-related tasks, and 30 percent on personal activities. Should that change to a 50-20-30 ratio—50 percent of her time on professional activities, 20 percent at home, and 30 percent on personal activities—she is likely not only to be chronically unhappy and frustrated, but perhaps never to understand why.

The Transitional Woman. Transitional women feel trapped. Their hearts are neither in their work nor in their homes. Most transitional

women are married, and many work outside the home. Only 28 percent stay at home full-time. A large percentage of them work because of economic pressure, many at jobs they do not enjoy. This intensifies the strain of having to cope with employment, home responsibilities, and guilt from neglecting the family.

Women in this group feel they have lost control over their lives. Basically, they are traditional in their values and attitudes, but they can't live in accordance with their beliefs. As an escape from their belief system, they tend to act out their frustrations by impulsive spending, excessive television viewing, reading romance novels, and constantly changing their hairstyle and makeup—all vain attempts to reduce the buildup of stress in their lives. Such escapes only create more stress. Because of their impulsive spending, more than 50 percent of transitional women live from paycheck to paycheck.

They lack confidence in their ability to solve conflict and need constant support to help them make life choices. Because these women have never decided whether to focus on homemaking or on a career, they are in a constant dilemma and are perhaps the most confused and unhappy of all three groups.

The Achiever. Achievers know what they want: a career. Their hearts and souls are focused on their work and achievement. They are so work-oriented that they volunteer to chair events, accept new assignments, and take on new challenges. They are overcommitted, overwhelmed, and overworked. They fear losing control—professionally, personally, and at home. So driven is this group that if their act misses a beat, their world comes crashing down. Achievers rate themselves highest on self-confidence, but they face serious time pressures that cause them frustration, anxiety, and conflict. Even so, when surveyed, 85 percent feel their lives are generally happy, probably because of the many rewards their careers provide.

Achievers view their homes differently than do traditional homemakers, whose homes become the center of their existence. Achievers see their homes as an expression of who they are and as a refuge from their busy schedules.

Similarly, an achieving woman would find nothing but frustration if she spent 50 percent of her time on home activities and only 20 to 30 percent on professional tasks. She finds happiness only when she spends the largest amount of her time pursuing professional interests.

Achievers are extremely self-reliant and fiercely independent in a relationship. They can afford to be, because the majority know they could

support themselves without assistance. This group is inclined to leave a bad marriage sooner than women in other groups. Family is important to achievers, but their careers and a sense of accomplishment come first.

If you feel uneasy about your life and how it's going, the first thing to do is track how you are living it. Then begin to conclude what *your* value system is—not just a value system your parents may have superimposed on you. (You may be able to solicit the advice of a close friend or family member. Others can often evaluate things in us that we have difficulty seeing in ourselves.) After you have evaluated your homemaking style, you now must decide: Can I do anything about it? Can I change? Shall I change? Will I change?

Much depends on your circumstances. For instance, if you are married, buying a home, furniture, and cars, and raising two elementary-age children, you may or may not be able to make changes without disrupting the family.

A caution: you must not act selfishly. But understanding what is causing the discomfort in your life may help you achieve some stability by making changes that are possible without major disruption to you or your family's well-being. You may also be able to adjust to your present situation. For instance, instead of moaning about staying home and taking care of children, change your attitude. Tell yourself, "I have accepted this challenge temporarily. I will follow through on my commitment, be a responsible adult, and enjoy fulfilling my responsibilities until such a time as a change can be effected."

Are you more traditional, transitional, or achieving? The first step to happiness is to discover which category fits your belief system. The next step is determining whether you are living in harmony with your belief system. Then you must do something about it. Choosing to live in harmony with your value system and with what's important to you will produce a higher level of contentment and infinitely lessen stress in your personal life.

The Impact of Organization on Family Stability

As a family life educator, I am convinced that families who follow a simple plan of routine and organization are stronger families. How you use your time, structure your life, and organize your home and time sharply impacts family stability.

*I just want the
merry-go-round to stop,
so I can quit being dizzy.*

KAREN OLSON,
INSURANCE AGENT

Innovative studies prove that organization is essential for family stability. Research now confirms that families are more capable of handling changes and crises when there is a degree of continuity and stability, measured by following established routines, principles of home organization, and quality of family time together.

Four Differing Family Types Identified

The Unpatterned Family. This family has never been organized or developed routines. Furthermore, it doesn't value organization or understand routines. To its members, organization and routine have no meaning or value.

Another term for this type of family is *chaotic*. Chaos dominates when it comes to meal preparation, laundry, order, cleanliness, and structure in everyday life. An example of an unpatterned, or chaotic, home recently came to my attention.

A woman who creates and sustains a home and under whose hands children grow up to be strong and pure men and women, is a creator second only to God.

HELEN HUNT JACKSON

Donna's mother had married five times. Because of the succession of men who came and went during her developing years, Donna had little recollection of her birth father. Her mother's love life was under so much stress that Mom had little time to nurture Donna or her three sisters. Laundry was done spasmodically. Nutritious meals were unheard of. Meals consisted of peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwiches the girls made for themselves and day-old Ding Dongs their mother brought home from the plant where she worked. Unless an older sister combed Donna's hair, there was no one to care about her appearance. She grew up like a weed, with no structure to her life.

Since she had never been taught principles of order or been required to live by them, she could not find happiness as an adult, and began acting out the same chaotic patterns she'd observed in her mother. Her marriage failed, as did all other endeavors she tried.

The Intended Family. This family sees and understands the value of organization and routine but never gets around to establishing anything. Probably Mom is so busy doing other things she lacks time to organize properly. Furthermore, she lacks discipline and structure in her own life. She has attended seminars and reads books and is certainly no dummy.

Lack of knowledge isn't her problem. It has more to do with organizing her time.

The Intended Family is good at saying such things as "It would be nice to eat a meal together once in a while, but . . ." "We should have worship each morning, but there isn't time." "I know I should get the kids to bed earlier, but . . ." "I really should work out a chore plan so I can get some help from the family, but . . ."

This family talks about making changes, but never gets around to doing anything about it. Good intentions; no follow-through.

The Structured Family. Structured families are organized and have many routines, but there is no meaning to them. Routines are usually rigidly enforced and are performed through habit and tradition, without thought about value or meaning.

Such families are usually formal and cold. No explanations or exceptions are allowed for rigid rules that govern the home. Parents control the home with little consideration for the needs of the individual. Rules are rules and made to be followed explicitly. The parents lack compassion and understanding. There is little warmth or caring here, since rigidity dominates. While such families often look good on the surface, they set individuals up to accept domination and vulnerability.

The Rhythmic Family. The rhythmic family is organized, efficient, orderly, and values the organization and routines established. It's not just having these routines and order that is important. Each family member understands and appreciates the value of the routine and activity.

For example, preparing supper for a child is not just a matter of providing a daily quota of calories and nutrients. Providing a meal can also be a process in which the child is made to feel secure because Mom or Dad provides it at a regular time and in a manner that fosters self-reliance. This becomes part of a tradition or routine that encourages the child to feel important and protected.

An example of a rhythmic family is the Merrill clan. Dubbed "America's Most Organized Family," the Merrills have to be organized, because 21 people depend on Rebecca and Roger Merrill. The clan includes seven children (ages 11 to 27, some married), in-laws, grandchildren, and grandparents. Roger is a consultant at the Covey Leadership Center in Provo, Utah. Stephen R. Covey, the center's founder, is author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Fireside, 1989) and teaches managers to organize their goals by deciding what is most important and never losing sight of it.

Organization is part of the Merrill family's daily agenda. Meal preparation is shared and mapped out in advance, down to the table decorations and the menu. Menus are planned for a week at a time. The grocery shopping is completed ahead of time and nonperishable items held in a large storeroom, where rows of canned food line the shelves.

Another list, "Chores and Bucks," details household tasks that pay. Washing dishes merits a quarter, taking out garbage 50 cents. The Merrills want their children to have a positive experience when getting the job done, not just to get the job done.

Can any family really be this organized? Roger Merrill believes that low-level decisions get low-level results, and that people who make them end up being mediocre. Mediocrity and disorganization are two things this family avoids.

The family has created its own mission statement, something Covey teaches corporations to do. The Merrills recall that the kids' reaction was predictable: "Give me a break!" But they persisted and together came up with a declaration of interdependence about loving and respecting one another.

By their own admission, the key to their efficiency lies in their family meeting. At 6:00 every morning this family gathers in the living room for Bible reading, a short discussion of the verses, and a hymn or song. For a grand finale, they often recite their family mission statement. This is also when tasks are assigned, problems discussed, and discipline problems handled. Most kids wouldn't want to be caught dead reading Scripture and singing with their parents, especially at 6:00 a.m. But it didn't take the Merrill kids long to learn that this type of organization and routine worked in their favor, not against them. The children have grown up with a sense of mission and organization. It's in their blood.

It is Rebecca Merrill who puts most of this into practice. While other women struggle to balance family and career, how does Rebecca keep her many responsibilities from overwhelming her? She works at home as a freelance writer, which allows her more flexibility to shuttle between priorities. But it is only because her household is organized and the children self-reliant that she manages.

Rebecca is busy, yes. But she and her husband still carve out time for each other. Once a month they go out by themselves. Order and organization do not cancel out romance, they say. It might be an evening at the symphony or a dinner in bed by candlelight, but they make time for each other. Once a month they take a married child out to dinner. And once a

year the entire family goes on a short holiday together. The Merrills seem to thrive on such family togetherness. Her family happiness "is the result of being organized, effective, and, most of all, principled," Rebecca says.

The Merrill family, like all rhythmic families, is durable and enduring. They can negotiate nearly every life change with relative comfort, because stability has been created through organization and routine.

Structure and organization become even more important during times of crisis. Families tend to lose sight of the value of routine when a child has been diagnosed with a terminal illness and neglect family time and routines. But a family in crisis needs to spend time maintaining stable patterns so that the family unit can maintain its sanity and stability. Without the rhythm, traditions, order, and routine that provide stability, the family is extremely vulnerable.

A Call to Excellence

You're not sure about all this new stuff? You say, "My family has been rocking along fairly well on our own without outside help." You may be doing OK, but mediocre isn't good enough anymore. God calls us to excellence.

The Bible gives us an example of excellence in Proverbs 31 that describes the ideal woman. Some may think this description doesn't fit women today. Few of us deal with merchant ships or have planted a vineyard. And I've never held a distaff. However, God's ideal never changes. His Word is always timely.

Here's my interpretation of Proverbs 31:10-31, put into today's vernacular. The ideal woman:

1. manages the affairs of her household efficiently (verse 27).
2. possesses a noble character (verses 10, 25, 29).
3. is a good wife (verses 10, 11, 12, 28).
4. gets up early and works late (verses 15, 18).
5. has a positive, energetic attitude toward work (verses 13, 17, 19).
6. plans menus and cooks for the family (verses 14, 15).
7. delegates tasks to others (verse 15).
8. conducts astute business deals in real estate, farming, the garment industry, marketing, and retail sales (verses 16, 24).
9. is financially knowledgeable (verse 18).
10. does charity work for the homeless (verse 20).
11. decorates her home in beautiful colors (verse 22).
12. dresses elegantly (verse 22).